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# THE MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECOGNITION OF DE GAULLE

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# I

## The Military Significance of the Recognition of De Gaulle

It should be noted that the problem thus stated implies a break with Vichy. It may not be discussed as the equivalent of a break with Vichy. For the latter could be accomplished without a recognition of De Gaulle.

### Summary.

Neither military nor psychological considerations would justify the United Nations' recognition of the De Gaulle National Committee as the de jure government of France. The advantages of such a recognition fall far short of the disadvantages.

The advantages however should be stated.

(a) The anomaly of our maintaining diplomatic relations with the collaborationist and totalitarian Vichy government, but not the Fighting French would be removed.

(b) The continued perseverance of the existing anti-German underground movements in Occupied and Vichy France might possibly be encouraged.

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(c) The morale of the Fighting French forces actually engaged in the field would be greatly heightened.

(d) Both Fighting French and other Frenchmen who have feared that the United Nations might not respect the future integrity of the Empire would be reassured.

On the other hand the disadvantages of recognition seem preponderant.

(a) The present Fighting French movement is weak and torn by dissensions:

1. Its detractors can argue to their own satisfaction that De Gaulle is a deserter, a traitor, a coward and a political bickerer.
2. It has failed to obtain the support of many leading Frenchmen who have escaped from France.
3. Its leadership in the underground movements of France, especially those carried on by the labor groups is in dispute.
4. It has by no means achieved the trust of the American and British governments.

(b) Many anti-Nazi Frenchmen, especially those in important positions in North and West Africa, would probably shift into the anti-United Nations camp.

(c) The Vichy government would probably accelerate its collaboration. It would have additional arguments both to keep reluctant collaborators in line and even to relinquish the fleet and empire for Axis use.

(d) Native nationalists in the French colonies, especially Syria and North Africa, would probably feel that their chance for autonomy had been set back.

(e) Through the concomitant break with Vichy the United Nations would lose: (1) Their important over-cover information facilities; (2) Their ability to exert any political pressure on Vichy; (3) Their ability to maintain contact with the millions of anti-Nazi Frenchmen living in continental France and the Vichy colonies.

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## Military Significance of the Recognition of De Gaulle

### A. Character of the De Gaulle movement

The Fighting French movement was founded by General Charles de Gaulle in the summer of 1940, ostensibly to keep the French Empire in the war at the side of the Allies, and to represent the interests and rights of the French people at the time of the peace. The British Government agreed to recognize General de Gaulle as the leader of all Frenchmen who would follow him, and gave him financial, political, and moral support.

De Gaulle, after the fiasco of Dakar, deviated from the course which many expected him to take, i.e. the formation of a semi-political, military movement established on broad democratic principles for united action with Great Britain and her allies. Instead, he refused to publicly adhere to any definite political principles and surrounded himself with numerous fascists and reactionaries, thus alienating many worthy democratic individuals and groups. He has mainly concerned himself with attempts at increasing his own personal prestige in territories which he controls and among the allied nations,- with particular success in Russia.

B. Effect of Recognition of De Gaulle on the movement and in Fighting French Territories.

(1) The Fighting French Movement.

In terms of the arguments which follow the recognition of the National Committee in its present form would be inadvisable. It would create long term difficulties with the leaders of the movement, possibly serious enough to outweigh the immediate gains.

Recognition would temporarily pacify De Gaulle and his advisors. It would give them a prestige which they have never yet been able to achieve. It would considerably increase the general, and possibly the fighting membership. To the present communist support within France the Socialists and the Trade Unionists might be added.

Among the long-term difficulties resulting from recognition should be counted:

(a) De Gaulle might feel that through his increased influence in France he could make or destroy the success of a second front in Europe and hence might seek to control United Nations' military strategy.

(b) In view of De Gaulle's unwillingness to admit advice or counsel, of his questionable political philosophy, of the presence of fascists among his advisors, it seems probable that by recognition the United States

would place in power a group of men hostile to its institutions and traditions. It has been implied and suggested by Rene Pleven, a close advisor of De Gaulle, that the total divergence of views and policies between America and Europe might readily cause an open conflict between the United States and France.

Consequently, one of the conditions of recognition should be the full and sincere support of democratic principles by the leaders of the movement. The evidence, however, does not point towards such a possibility.

(2) Free French Africa

The recognition of De Gaulle would bolster greatly the morale of the Fighting French army (15,000), administration, and civilians in Equatorial Africa and the Cameroons, most of whom are ardent De Gaulle followers. Such a move might dispel the suspicions of British and American policy created by the failure to send substantial amounts of military supplies to Equatorial Africa and by the handling of the Madagascar and Syrian questions. Most of the natives lack political consciousness and recognition would mean little or nothing to them.

(3) Syria and Lebanon

The recognition of De Gaulle would further intensify the already strained situation in Syria and

Lebanon. The entire population of Syria and two-thirds of the population of Lebanon have been reported as hostile to French rule and consider the De Gaullists, who are opposed to the British plan for a general election, as the perpetuation of a vicious regime. If the recognition of De Gaulle would mean the surrender of the natives to the old French imperialism, the prestige of the United Nations among the peoples of the Near East would suffer another blow. This result would be much more damaging to the war effort of the United Nations, than the possible close cooperation of the Fighting French in Syria with the United Nations. The number of French troops in Syria and Lebanon has been estimated recently at only 5000 and many of these are local Lebanese.

(4) Pacific Islands

In New Caledonia the recognition of De Gaulle would strengthen the authority of the present High Commissioner D'Argenlieu who was put in office by the London Committee against the wishes of both the Frenchmen (17,000 est.) and the natives on the island. Perpetuation of his rule might possibly lead to popular discontent which would handicap the war effort of the occupying power, the United States.

In Tahiti the existing De Gaullist Government has become utterly unpopular even though natives are fighting in Africa under De Gaulle's banner. A recognition of this government might conceivably jeopardize the favorable position which the United States' forces in the area enjoy at the present time.

(5) St. Pierre and Miquelon.

The recognition of De Gaulle would have no significant military consequences. It would merely lead to the legal recognition of the Fighting French who have occupied the islands since December 1941.

C. Effect of Recognition of De Gaulle on France and Vichy's Colonies

The policy of the Vichy Government toward the war is dominated by German pressure for cooperation against the United Nations. No major French decision can be taken without regard for German wishes. Within the limits which Germany allows, the French government seeks to preserve an essentially "pro-French" policy aimed at keeping the country at peace and conserving intact France's strength at home and in the colonies so as to employ it only when it can intervene to serve French interests. French public opinion generally approves this policy although its profound anti-German sentiments check Vichy's inclinations toward all-out collaboration. Within the limits set by German policy and the pressure of public opinion the various groups and personalities influential in the Vichy Government exert their power. Their attitudesrange from frank and open support of outright Fascism and a German victory to a policy of reluctant collaboration and moderate conservatism.

1. Vichy France

The recognition of De Gaulle would probably give to Germany increased possibilities of drawing France

into active military opposition to the United Nations and its effect would largely depend upon the attitude of the Vichy Government, the military leaders, and the French public.

(a) The Vichy Government has peace as its primary objective, not only for the good of France but for the continued existence of the government itself. This has been the chief consideration guiding Marshal Petain, and Pierre Laval, the head of the Government, is believed to share this attitude in spite of his collaborationist sympathies. The recognition of De Gaulle by the United States would probably result in increased German pressure along the following lines:

i. The Vichy Government's desire to conserve the status quo would be difficult to maintain as the collaborationists would have been strengthened by the recognition of De Gaulle and German pressure intensified in anticipation of military operations.

ii. This might result in a more active policy of collaboration including the grant to Germany of military facilities such as transit rights and the use of French airdromes, merchant ships, and ports. Incidents between France and the United Nations could result from these and similar measures.

iii. This accelerated rate of collaboration might lead to a state of war, which could also result from the installation in France of a puppet regime. The value of the French war contribution would depend upon the ability of the French to interpret it as an operation in the defence of strictly French interests.

(b) French military and naval chiefs are loyal to the Vichy Government and can be expected to obey orders as long as they appear to come from French leaders. The metropolitan Army of 80,000 is well-trained but lacks equipment. The naval units are in good condition and its officers are generally believed to be anti-British. The men of the ranks would probably be loyal.

Admiral Darlan, Commander-in-Chief of the French armed forces, is an anti-British collaborationist without being pro-German. He has purged the army and navy of officers hostile to collaboration and replaced them by men of his own choosing.

General Bridoux, Commander-in -Chief of the Army and Secretary of State for War is believed to favor Germany and to be a strong supporter of collaboration.

General Jennequin, head of the air force and Secretary of State for Air has fought against the British in Syria and would probably be prepared to resist Allied attacks again.

Admiral Auphan, Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet and Secretary of State for the Navy, is said to be anti-British although he is definitely known to be anti-German and would probably refuse to cooperate with the Axis.

(c) Public opinion in Unoccupied France is definitely anti-German. It is not ardently pro-De Gaullist and would probably be confused by the act of recognition and by the Vichy and German propaganda which would ensue, unless recognition were clearly directed against Germany and not against the Vichy Government. For example, it could be an answer to the setting up of Doriot as head of the French Government or it could be accompanied by vigorous military action against the Germans in Europe. This would also offset the confusion caused by the fupture of relations with the United States which the French public has always tried to avoid. On the other hand, if recognition were accompanied by action against Vichy's colonies French public opinion would turn against the United States.

2. Occupied France

Public opinion in Occupied France is probably more hostile to the Germans and more favorable to De Gaulle than that in Vichy France. For this reason and because the Frenchmen in Occupied France are not so susceptible to Vichy propaganda it is probable that the recognition of De Gaulle would intensify the opposition to Germany and stimulate support for the United Nations.

3. French North Africa.

The recognition of De Gaulle would seriously handicap any United Nations war effort in North Africa. Besides a small, but influential group of outright collaborationists, most of the North African Frenchmen in the army, the navy, and civilian life are anti-Nazi, anti-British, and anti-De Gaulle. They might aid the American war effort if it were supported by substantial military power, but might hesitate if it involved subordination to De Gaulle.

(a) The civilian administrators, Fenard (Secretary-General for North Africa), Chatel (Algeria), Nogues (Morocco), Esteva (Tunisia), have often expressed pro-American sentiments, but have enforced a ruthless policy of suppression against all persons suspected of pro-De Gaulle sympathies.

(b) The majority of higher army and navy officers cannot be described as pro-United Nations and certainly not as pro-De Gaulle. With few exceptions they are considered colorless Vichy followers, ready to obey all orders. Those with the strongest anti-Nazi sentiments have been removed during the present year. Juin (C.O. for North Africa) is considered an opportunist, who in spite of his anti-German sentiments might be affected

by being on parole from a German prison camp. Koeltz (C.O. for Algeria) is said to be anti-British and anti-German. Barre (C.O. for Tunisia) is described as colorless, but somewhat favorable to the United Nations cause. Most of the Admirals are personal appointees of Darlan.

(c) Among the 110,000 enlisted men widespread pro-De Gaulle sentiment has never been reported, except in the air force. Neither the naval personnel, constantly reminded by French propaganda of the Dakar and Mers el Kebir incidents, nor the troops evacuated from Syria and now stationed in North Africa can be expected to include many De Gaulle sympathizers. The Senegalese regiments and the native Moroccan troops have probably no opinion of their own on this subject.

(d) Among the 1,000,000 civilian Frenchmen De Gaulle sentiment is strongest in Algeria; a recognition of De Gaulle would not increase the size of this group substantially.

(e) To most of the 16,000,000 natives of North Africa the recognition of De Gaulle will make no difference, but the nationalist groups especially in Morocco and Tunisia will see in such a recognition the continuation of French rule without substantial reforms, unless De Gaulle is able to promise a liberal colonial policy effective upon occupation and not in the future.

4. French West Africa.

A recognition of De Gaulle would remove the possibility of cooperation between French West African officials and the United Nations.

(a) Pierre Boisson, the Governor-General, is constantly reported as anti-De Gaulle, anti-British, and anti-Nazi. He defended Dakar in September 1940 against the De Gaulle and British forces. He might resist German infiltration in the present situation, but a recognition of De Gaulle is likely to make him forget his anti-German sentiments. The governors of the seven colonies in French West Africa and of the territory of Togo will probably follow his leadership.

(b) The commanding officers of the army (Barrau), navy (Collinet), and air forces (Gama) are all said to be strongly anti-British and anti-De Gaulle. General Barrau was in charge of the Dakar defenses in September 1940. General Gama is reported to be a collaborationist.

(c) Among the officers and enlisted men no De Gaulle sentiment has been reported except in isolated cases. Most of the United Nations sympathizers have been removed. The Senegalese troops can be expected to follow orders. The navy personnel is supposed to be anti-British and loyal to Vichy.

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(d) Most of the 40,000 (est.) Frenchmen in ~~North~~ West Africa will follow the leadership of the administration.

(e) The 14,000,000 (est.) natives will not be affected either way by a recognition of De Gaulle.

5. Madagascar.

The recognition of De Gaulle would probably not affect the situation materially. The northern tip of the island is British-occupied, and the rest is dominated by a Vichy-controlled bureaucratic machine under Governor General Armand Annet, who has hitherto applied a rigorously anti-British policy.

Though prior to the British attack on Diego-Suarez, up to 90% of the French residents (30,000 out of a total population of nearly 4,000,000) were credited with Free French leanings, this supposed majority has failed to take any effective action since the British occupation began. The Fighting French ascribe this failure to the exclusion of French cooperation in the occupation of the island. The native population is politically unimportant, and tends to avoid involvement in any quarrel among Frenchmen.

6. French Somaliland.

The administration of Governor Pierre Nouailhetas has remained loyal to Vichy and anti-De Gaulle despite the

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crippling effects of more than six months of British blockade (summer 1941-spring 1942). The administration dominates the situation through its control of the military (mainly Senegalese) and the native police forces. Moreover, the French population (10,000) has never given evidence of Fighting French leanings, and the natives (est. 40,000) are poor nomads with little or no political interest. Some desertions of French military personnel to the Free French in East Africa have been reported, but their rate is unlikely to be accelerated by the recognition of De Gaulle.

7. Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana.

The recognition of De Gaulle would probably not change the anti-Vichy attitude of the government officials or enable the overwhelmingly anti-Vichy French civilians in these areas to overthrow the existing regime. On the other hand, De Gaulle himself has been suspicious of the direct negotiations between the United States and Admiral Robert at Martinique and a recognition of De Gaulle might further complicate and embitter the relations between the Fighting French and the United Nations.

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8. French Indo-China.

The recognition of De Gaulle could hardly move the Vichy officials to any closer collaboration with Japan than they are giving now. The anti-Vichy and anti-Japanese elements among the French would probably not increase in number, but might be encouraged in their resistance. The strong nationalist elements among the natives, especially the Annamese, are likely to conclude that the recognition of De Gaulle implies the support by the United Nations of French colonial rule. This is likely to complicate future military operations in this area.